

## Skippin' Reels of Rhyme A Performer's Encounter with John Corgiliano's Mr Tambourine Man: Seven Poems of Bob Dylan

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Fig. 1

The songs featured are taken from John Corigliano's Mr Tambourine Man: Seven Poems of Bob Dylan (2000). These musical settings provide us with an opportunity to observe not only a fascinating evolution of Dylan's literary style, both in theme and poetic device, but also an opportunity to hear some of the finest American art songs of the twenty-first century. His words, concise yet electric and intense, now have the added layering of a classical musical score, providing the performer with a unique platform where they can engage with Dylan's work in new and innovative ways.

Investigating the variety of compositional techniques used, it is possible to devise a map, derived from the composer's responses, that gives birth to a compelling and cohesive vehicle for a performer engaging with Dylan's texts. Points of entry include repetition, the use of space and silence, rhythmic device, word painting and setting, syllabic placement, use of accent and stress, inventive use of structure, harmonic and melodic device, and performance gesture.

As an undisputed voice of America's whimsical dream, Bob Dylan (1941-) remains an enduring symbol of contemporary American cultural agency. Whilst there has been much discussion and debate relating to Dylan's life and music there has been surprisingly little study done into the emergent pool of song settings and performances of his poems. Yet composers and performers continue to be increasingly seduced by the ambiguity and abstraction of Dylan's lyric style.

In shaping his prosody Dylan drew heavily on musical concept, colour and device. Music is both the ground on which the superstructure of his poetic thought was built and a condition of being towards which it aspired. Referencing musical settings of his written work (now regarded as seminal fodder within the contemporary American folk/popular song canon), this project centres on the performer's role in bringing Dylan's lyrics to life via an alternative musical idiom: the contemporary American art song.

This body of research creates a rare opportunity to explore the interaction between 'players' in Dylan's drama of self, the ways in which they are reflected and expressed in literary terms, and how both composer and performer are inspired to then interpret his work through their own artistic filters.



2



Fig. 3

By documenting the performer's creative journey in bringing these musical narratives to life, it is my wish that this research will serve to inspire, and establish, a new forum for the way in which we read, hear and perform the work of Bob Dylan.

## Contact

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## Official Launch

Thursday June 30<sup>th</sup> 2016, University of Oxford Pre-performance lecture (2pm) – RAI Recital (6.30pm) - Holywell Music Room Allegra Giagu (soprano), Hannah Sanders (soprano), Nicole Panizza (piano) Admission: £10/£8

## References

- 1. Ochs Archive/Getty Images, Bob Dylan, 1960
- 2. J. Henry Fair, John Corigliano, 2013
- 3. . L. Oppenheimer, , Mr Tambourine Man Inspired by Dylan (collection), 2013
- 4. J. Corigliano, *Mr Tambourine Man: Seven Poems of Bob Dylan*, Schirmer, 2000